

## The Calling of an Asian Biblical Scholar/Theologian: Challenges Facing Asian Evangelicals Today

By Dr. Rico Villanueva, ABC General Editor

Recently, I attended an international conference of biblical scholars in Asia. I got interested in one of the sessions on "biblical studies in Asia." One of the presenters shared her own experience as a Korean biblical scholar. She mentioned about the tragic incident in 2014 when the Korean MVSewol ship sank, killing more than 300 people, mostly students. She thought of coming up with articles or reflection papers on the incident. So she called for biblical scholars to contribute. But not one biblical scholar responded. Later, during the Q&A portion, I asked her why there was no response from the biblical scholars. And she answered, because biblical scholars see their task as descriptive, not prescriptive. In other words, the biblical scholar is only to interpret what the text meant in ancient time. Period. The task of relating the meaning of the text or its message for today is beyond the scope of their job description. Another reason she mentioned was because of western scholarship.

It is this dichotomy between biblical studies and theology that has plagued western scholarship since the Enlightenment period. Unfortunately, it is making its impact among Asian biblical scholars and theologians, most of whom have received their training from the West. This includes me. And even those who did their training in Asia have been trained by those who have their PhDs from the West. Thus, it is not surprising that the practice and the views/perspectives from the West are replicated in Asia. Even in

this article, I have to refer to biblical scholars *and* theologians separately.

This was not the case in the past from the Church Fathers like Saint Augustine to the Reformers John Calvin and Martin Luther. Calvin is an exegete par excellence, a theologian, and a pastor all rolled into one! The same thing can be said of Augustine and Luther. So what happened? How did we come to this point where doing biblical studies and theology has become two separate tasks? Why was application to the church marginalized among biblical scholars? I still remember one Filipino seminary student asking an American New Testament scholar what his ideas are in terms of the application of the text they are discussing. The NT scholar simply said, "Ask the pastoral ministry professor." Is the calling of the biblical scholar simply that of a historian or like that of a scientist? One seminary president told me that they do not allow their biblical scholars to preach in the church. An article by Hewitt in Quarantelli on another field of study is relevant for theology and biblical studies: "Disaster Sociology for whom?" We ask, "Theology/biblical studies for whom?"

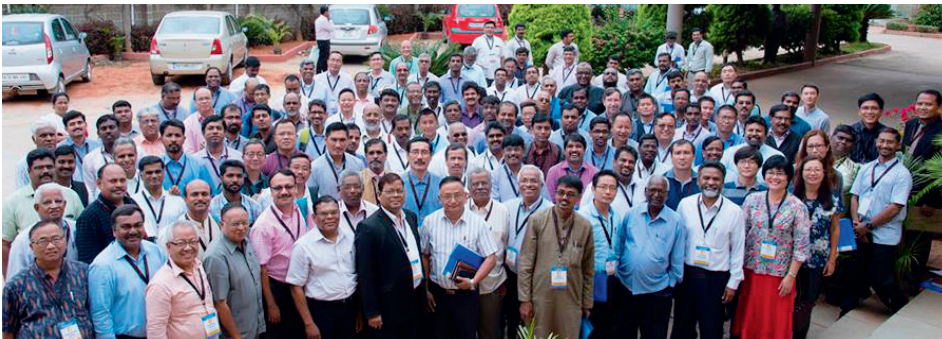
These are some of the questions we hope to address in the 2017 ATA Theological Consultation on July 18-20 to be held at Southeast Asia Bible Seminary in Malang, Indonesia. The consultation is open not only to biblical scholars and theologians but also to historians, social scientists, and educators, who have an interest



in understanding the role of Bible and theology in their respective contexts in Asia. Part of the goal of this Theological Consultation is to listen to each other. Our desired outcome is clarity on what we are being asked to do as biblical scholars/theologians in relation to the Church and wider Asian realities. We hope this conversation will encourage integration across disciplines building on Evangelical convictions to address the pressing questions raised by our various contexts in Asia.

The consultation is also a continuation of the conversation started during the 2016 ATA Triennial General Assembly in Korea where different groups met to discuss their disciplines. Some expressed the idea of forming a society of biblical scholars/theologians among ATA member institutions. We'll see if this will be a reality, especially now that we are nearing our ATA 50th anniversary. ■

## ATA India Holds Annual Meetings at SAIACS



The Managing Committee Meeting and the Annual Meetings of ATA India were held at South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies (SAIACS)

CEO Centre, Bangalore on August 29-31, 2016. This year's gathering was special on two counts—the presence of ATA International's newly installed General

Secretary, Dr. Theresa Lua along with Dr. Federico Villanueva, Publications Secretary and a record number of over 160 participants representing ATA member institutions from across the country. The highlight of these meetings was a special evening on the 30th where Dr. Lua was felicitated during which time four of the Asia Bible Commentary series were re-launched. Drs. Lua and Villanueva also helped with two evaluation visits to the Ebenezer Theological Seminary in the southern state of Kerala and SAIACS in Bangalore.

The ATA India chapter comprises of 92 institutions with accredited programs and another 58 who are in the process of preparing for evaluation in the next few years. Apart from regular visits for evaluation and encouragement, the ATA India staff (Dr. Paul Cornelius, Rev. Uday Kumar, Rev. Vishwas Padole, Mrs. Kezia Kripanidhi, and Mr. Daniel), also periodically conduct seminars for faculty growth and development. We encourage you to pray for the work of ATA India which comes with its own unique challenges and opportunities. ■

## NTA Sponsors a Seminar on Development of Theological Education in Nepal



A seminar on "Capacity Building" was held at the Nepal Theological College on October 19-20, 2016 where Dr. Paul Cornelius, Regional Secretary of ATA-India was the main speaker. Other resource persons were Dr. Bal Krishna Sharma and Dr. Saggi Abraham. During the event a video of Dr. Bruce Nichols was shown encouraging all theological colleges to do their best and to aim for a Christian University in Kathmandu after one or two decades.

The 60 participants who benefitted from this seminar came from Nepal Theological Academy (NTA) and other colleges, churches, and organizations in Kathmandu. This significant event aimed at the development of theological education in Nepal which is the vision and mission of Nepal Theological Academy, a consortium of five Bible schools offering advanced programs. ■

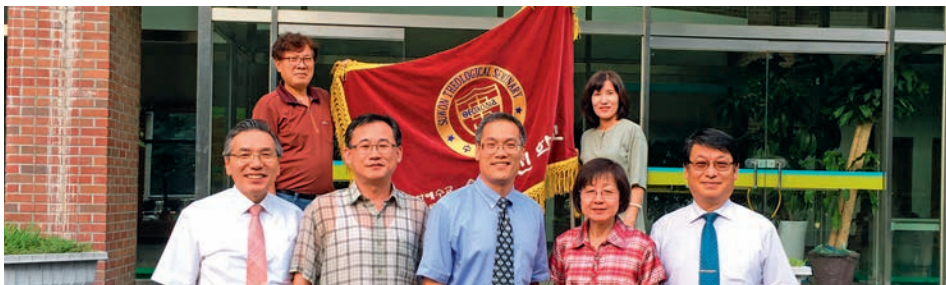
Save the Date

ATA Theological Consultation  
THE CALLING OF AN ASIAN BIBLICAL  
SCHOLAR/THEOLOGIAN: CHALLENGES  
FACING ASIAN EVANGELICALS TODAY

July 18-20, 2017  
Malang, Indonesia

## ATA VET Visits Various Schools in Korea, India, Singapore, and Malaysia

### Suwon Theological Seminary



The ATA Visiting Evaluation Team (VET) consisting of Dr. Ng Peh Cheng, Associate Secretary of Accreditation and Educational Development, ATA; Dr. Jonathan Ro, Director of Intercultural Studies, GETS Theological Seminary, USA; and Dr. Dong Chan Seo, Academic Dean, Korea University of International Studies visited Suwon Theological Seminary (STS), South Korea on August 1-3, 2016.

Suwon Theological Seminary began as the Suwon Bible School. It was founded by the Suwon Presbytery of the General Assembly of Presbyterian Church in

Korea (GAPCK) in 1972. The name was changed to Suwon Theological Seminary in 1976 and moved to its present location in 1995. Its missions are to educate future pastors and church leaders who are well equipped by the Calvinistic reformed theology; to bring up and train competent pastors, missionaries, evangelists, and other leaders according to local churches' and mission fields' practical needs; and to enhance students' moral and godly character and live according to the reformed puritans' faith and piety. STS offers Diploma of Theology and Bachelor of Theology. ■

### Ebenezer Theological Seminary, Kerala, India



The VET consisting of Dr. Theresa Lua, General Secretary, ATA International; Dr. Federico Villanueva, ATA Publications Secretary; and Dr. Paul Cornelius, Regional Secretary, ATA-India visited the Ebenezer Theological Seminary (ETS), Kerala, India on September 1-3, 2016.

The Ebenezer Theological Seminary was established in 1997 by Dr. Chacko Thomas, the founder principal. His vision was to train people actively involved in various walks of Christian life and provide continuing education for those already engaged in mission. The larger goal was to prepare men and women for the evangelization of Asia through proclamation and planting churches. The mission of ETS is to train young men and women to become partners for world



Quick visit to New India Bible Seminary

mission by which they become radical followers of Christ and fulfill the Great Commission. The school offers Bachelor of Theology, Master of Divinity, and Master of Theology.

The ATA VET team also had a short visit to New India Bible Seminary in Kerala where they had a chance to meet Dr. Saphir Athyal, one of the key founders of Asia Theological Association. ■

### South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies, Bangalore, India



The ATA VET consisting of Dr. Theresa, ATA General Secretary; Dr. Federico Villanueva, ATA Publication Secretary, and Dr. Prem Williams, Faculty, Baptist Seminary of South India visited South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies (SAIACS), Bangalore, India on September 5-7, 2016.

SAIACS began with the conviction that the churches in India needed a reputable mission-focused center of higher theological learning to equip people to meet the challenges of the 21st century. In 1981 two missionaries, Dr. Bruce Nicholls and Dr. Graham Houghton shared their dreams and like-minded people in Chennai, agreed on the need for an M.Th. in Missiology. The program was offered through the Association for Evangelical Theological Education in India (AETEI). In 1984 the program was de-linked from AETEI to become SAIACS, and moved to Bangalore with Graham Houghton as the Principal. It has been registered as an Educational Trust in 1985. In 1997, SAIACS was recognized by the University of Mysore, a premier State university, as a research center for study leading to the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree of the University of Mysore, Karnataka. On June, 2011, the University of Mysore recognized SAIACS as center for Specialized Studies to offer Master of Arts in Theology.

SAIACS is currently pursuing collaboration with Martin Luther Christian University, Shillong for the M.Th./M.Phil. program. SAIACS is interdenominational and has no formal constituency but serves evangelical Protestant churches and mission agencies. Its mission is to be a world-class post-graduate theological institution in South Asia, greatly serving the mission of the Church of Jesus Christ globally. SAIACS offers Master of Arts; Master of Divinity, Master of Theology, Master of Christian Studies, Doctor of Philosophy, and Doctor of Ministry. ■

## Asia Bible Commentary Series

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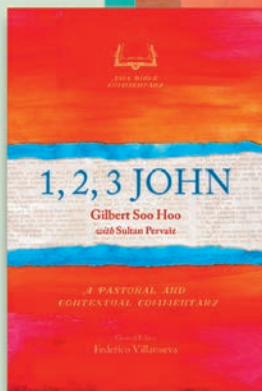
*New Volume*

### 1, 2, 3 John

Gilbert Soo Hoo  
with Pervaiz Sultan  
ISBN: 9781783688654  
£9.99 / \$19.99

Today, the Asian church ministers in a multi-religious and often multi-cultural environment faces serious challenges. Thankfully, we have a resource that offers guidance and encouragement – the ancient documents known as 1, 2 and 3 John. In this commentary Dr. Gilbert Soo Hoo provides careful textual analysis alongside contextual relevance in the hope that the reader will hear God's voice, encouraging them to become disciples that live in fellowship with the Father and the Son and with one another. The fundamental christological truths presented serve as a template to help evaluate various teachings and to discern what is true and what is false, which is critical for believers living and serving in multi-religious Asia.

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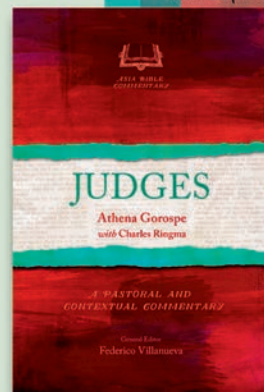
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### Judges

Athena E. Gorospe  
with Charles Ringma  
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The book of Judges marks an important transition in the life of Israel. It shows the cycle of deviancy and repentance, heroic actions and social collapse, the misuse of power and the marginalization of God. This commentary seeks to help readers navigate the many strange stories and characters of Judges by providing an overall framework for reading it and by explaining a way of entering its stories so that they can be appropriated in an Asian context. This commentary challenges the reader to pray and work for a spiritual revitalization, building a new social fabric in a world marked by injustice, pragmatism, and the loss of a God-centered way of life.

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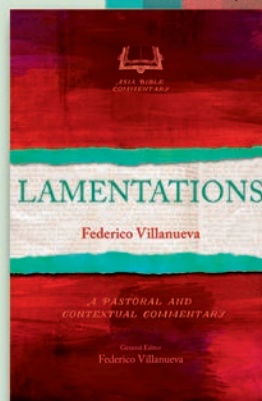
*New Volume*

### Lamentations

Federico Villanueva  
ISBN: 9781783681914  
£9.99 / \$19.99

The book of Lamentations cannot be truly appreciated without knowing suffering and the agony that follows tragic experiences. In this commentary Dr. Federico Villanueva relates the experience of his fellow country men and women in the Philippines in the wake of Typhoon Yolanda to the experience of the Jewish people after the destruction of Judah and the city of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. By drawing these parallels the author hopes that together we will read Lamentations in collective solidarity with a suffering people.

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## Asia Bible Commentary Series

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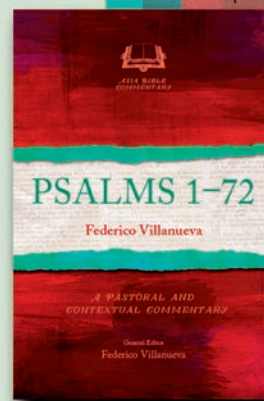
### Psalms 1-72

Federico Villanueva  
ISBN: 9781783688654  
£12.99 / \$24.99

The Asia Bible Commentary series empowers Christian believers in Asia to read the Bible from within their respective contexts. Holistic in its approach to the text, each exposition of the biblical books combines exegesis and application. The ultimate goal is to strengthen the Body of Christ in Asia by providing pastoral and contextual exposition of every book of the Bible.

This commentary on Psalms 1-72 provides an exposition that the reader can engage with in their own community of faith in the Asian cultural context. Along with a commentary on each Psalm, Dr. Federico Villanueva provides cultural reflections on a wide variety of relevant topics that include the likes of lament, praise, creation, meditation, depression and natural phenomena. This commentary is an excellent resource for pastors, lay leaders and Bible students but will also be useful and relevant for any Christian committed to applying the Bible in their respective contexts.

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## ATA-ICETE SEMINAR

### DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF RESEARCH FOR DELIVERING POSTGRADUATE COURSES

DR. IAN J. SHAW

Associate International Director of Langham Scholars Programme; Honorary Fellow, School of Divinity, New College, University of Edinburgh, Scotland

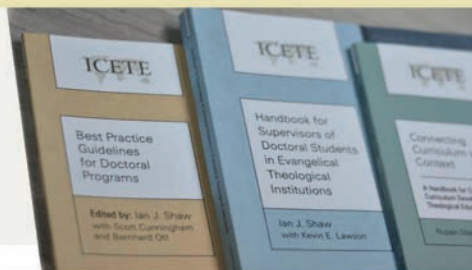
Date: February 24-25, 2017

Place: Philippines

Cost and other details to follow.

To register go to: [www.ataasia.com](http://www.ataasia.com)

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This seminar-workshop will cover issues like:

- What is Research, and Why are Evangelicals Sometimes Suspicious of it?
- What is the Best Environment for Postgraduate Studies to Flourish in?
- How to create a culture of research
- What are the key research questions that need to be asked?
- The Professional Development of Faculty
- Resourcing the Creation of a Culture of Research
- The Place of Majority World Scholarship in Global Academic Discourse

## Singapore Bible College



The Singapore Bible College (SBC) was visited by the ATA VET consisting of Dr. Ng Peh Cheng, Associate Secretary of Accreditation and Educational Development, ATA; Rev. Dr. Stephen Oliver, Professor of New Testament, China Lutheran Seminary, Taiwan; and Dr. Paul Cornelius, ATA Regional Secretary-India on September 19-21, 2016.

Singapore Bible College was founded in 1952 as an interdenominational theological institution which provide evangelical Bible training to equip workers for Christian service. SBC moved to its present campus in 1958. The mission of Singapore Bible College is to glorify God by training faithful servants of Jesus Christ for the edification of the Church and the

urgent evangelization of the unreached. It began "primarily as a Chinese language training institution" but now operates the School of Theology (Chinese), School of Theology (English), School of Counseling (English), and the School of Church Music (English & Chinese). In addition, the Ichthus Research Centre for Biblical and Theological Studies was started in 2001 to "promote biblical and theological scholarship within Asia." Several months ago, Dr. Clement Chia Mook Soo was installed as the 7th principal of the college.

The school offers Graduate Diploma, Master of Arts, Master of Christian Studies, Master of Theology, Master of Divinity, and Doctor of Ministry. It also offers eGraduate Diploma in Christian Studies (non-campus based/fully online program). ■

## Discipleship Training Centre



The Discipleship Training Centre (DTC) was visited by the ATA Visiting Evaluation Team consisting of Dr. Ng Peh Cheng, Associate Secretary of Accreditation and Educational Development, ATA; Rev. Dr. Stephen

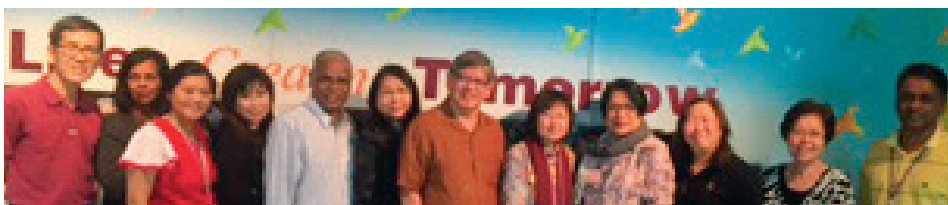
Oliver, Professor of New Testament, China Lutheran Seminary, Taiwan; and Dr. Paul Cornelius, ATA Regional Secretary-India on September 22-24, 2016.

DTC was established in August 1968 by Overseas Missionary Fellowship leaders who invited Dr. David Adeney to be the Founding Dean to setup a theological education center in Asia. Dr. Adeney's focus on "Biblical studies, cross-cultural community life, and practical

experience in ministry" remains the emphasis of DTC's training program.

The Discipleship Training Centre seeks to glorify God by equipping graduates to serve the churches in Asia and the rest of the world through the formation and discipling of the whole person within a residential cross-cultural and multicultural community under the lordship of Jesus Christ. The school offers Graduate Diploma in Intercultural Studies, Master of Christian Ministry, and Master of Christian Studies by Research. ■

## Alpha Omega International College



The Visiting Evaluation Team consisting of Dr. Ng Peh Cheng, CAED Associate Secretary; Dr. Madeline Vega, Old Testament Professor, Asia Theological Seminary, Philippines; and Dr. Tony Lim, Vice Principal/Academic Dean, Malaysia Bible Seminary visited Alpha Omega International College (AOIC), Petaling Jaya, Malaysia on September 28-30, 2016.

AOIC began as TCA College, Malaysia in 1998. It became an independent theological institution known as AOIC in 2007 and moved to its present location in 2010. The school comes under the sponsorship of Grace Assembly, a member of the Assemblies of God of Malaysia. Grace Assembly remains committed to provide resources and facilities for the operation of AOIC.

Alpha Omega International College provides Christian men and women with relevant, practical, and academic Christian training programs, so that the churches will have well-trained and effective workers and leaders that can carry out the mission of God in communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world. To this end, in all its activities including instruction, nurture, worship, service, and research, AOIC strives for excellence in the service of Jesus Christ, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of the Father. The school offers Certificate, Diploma, Bachelor, Master of Arts, and Master of Divinity programs. ■

## Book Review of Lamentations: A Pastoral and Contextual Commentary



*Reviewed by Rev. Ashkenaz Asif Khan  
Principal, Zarephath Bible Seminary  
Rawalpindi, Pakistan*

It is my privilege to present a brief review of the newly written and published commentary on the book of Lamentations. I would like to congratulate the author, Dr. Federico Villanueva, for writing a commentary on a neglected book. I have not preached from this book but now after reading it I am encouraged to preach from this book.

The book has been dedicated to the victims and survivors of the Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan internationally) which brought death and destruction in Philippines. By extension the dedication can also include all those who through natural calamities and in general by manmade conflicts.

The commentary chapters are divided into section according to the themes and not verse by verse. The book of Lamentations is not written as a theological book but describes the experience of national disaster which fell upon the people of Jerusalem. This experience became historical narrative of the community and still is today for the Jews.

Chapter One describes the role of the poet as a model comforter. It has a section on the subject how a believer can go through the process of pain. Telling one's story of suffering is a means for restoration.

Chapter Two describes very important aspect of the needs of those who suffer. They need someone or a group to affirm and validate what they feel or what they are going through. The poet (the author of the Lamentations) identifies with the community. The author has challenged the church to be the conscience of the nation. He has also pointed out a shortcoming of prophets of that day who preached that disaster will not come. The discussion will encourage the reader to look for ways to use prophetic discourse on speaking about the events of our present-day community and national issues.

Chapter Three includes the discussion on the topic such as "Why God?" The author describes in detail why and how people believe that God allowed the suffering to happen. The author also mentions what is the right response so that the victims do not suffer more. So, he considers the subject of hope, waiting, and perseverance.

Chapter Four has the theme that suffering can and should bring the community together. It provides collective strength to face a situation beyond individual capacity. I personally think we have lost the art of mourning and lament for our collective sorrows fallen on our communities and villages and cities. The modern city and national government is left responsible to declare the mourning and express some symbolic gestures and carry out relief work.

Chapter Five includes a section on the prayer for restoration. The subject of sin and repentance are also discussed in the various sections.

By reading the book I was challenged to reflect on the context in the Asian countries I have visited. The realities are that these societies are becoming more individualistic as we see the urbanization process happening on a fast track along with economic growth. This new way of life demands that the church is equipped to cope with individual and collective suffering. The book is very useful for pastors, community and social workers, NGOs, and counselors.

The book is well documented with true to life examples and stories, which makes this commentary unique. The bibliography is useful for anyone wanting to read more on the topic of suffering and disaster.

***This review of ABC Lamentations was delivered on July 26, 2016 during the ATA Triennial General Assembly held at Chongshin University & Theological Seminary, Republic of Korea. ■***

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